Hierarchy of Concerns – For Assessing Writing

DOES THE ESSAY FIT THE ASSIGNMENT?

If not, it's usually impossible to grade. Don't mark essay. Ask student to resubmit.

SCOPE OF TOPIC

Is the topic too wide, too narrow? Is there a clear thesis or point of view?

➢Discuss ways to move from a vague draft to a focused paper, using student examples or your own writing.

➢Read examples of good opening paragraphs in class.

CRITICAL THINKING

Is the argument complex? Does the writer consider various points of view, counterarguments?

➢Your comments point out gaps, other points to consider.

Evidence, Scholarship

Does the writer use evidence to support all assertions?

Is the evidence from the appropriate kinds of sources?

➢Devote class time to discussing differences between scholarly and nonscholarly sources.

Clarity

Does the essay make sense as a whole?

Are paragraphs cohesive (are there paragraphs?)

Does the essay lead somewhere, or wander off?

➢Have students exchange essays in pairs or small groups for peer review.

Transitions

Do transitional sentences or phrases connect ideas?

➢Show students examples of essays with and without transitions. Attention to transitions is a simple and concrete way many students can improve their writing.

Tone

Is the tone appropriate for the task?

➢Explain conventions of writing in this discipline, i.e. whether use of first person is acceptable, should the writer strive to be engaging or to sound neutral, etc.

Word Choice, Sentence Structure

Is vocabulary sufficiently sophisticated? Are words repeated?

Is sentence structure varied? Do sentences start and stop appropriately?

Grammar, Punctuation

➢If many errors, hand paper back ungraded and ask student to proofread.

Format, Citation Style

➢If many errors, ask student to resubmit in proper format/style.